

A TRIBUTE TO SISTER ANDAIYE:

By Tacuma Ogunseye

A bright star has been eclipsed. When a comrade falls in the struggle, whether it is as the result of natural causes or otherwise, it is an unwelcome moment, and one for deep reflection, particularly when that comrade has had a profound influence on shaping one's individual politics and life.

Sister Andaiye is such a person. In many ways, she had contributed significantly to shaping my politics and life. I am indebted to her for deepening my understanding of the application of theory and practice relative to the struggle for political and social liberation.

Her emphasis on the need to pay special attention to gender and child rights created an indelible impression on me. My activism in ASCRIA in my youthful days had engendered in me "love" and appreciation for the historical African woman, and women in general. This activism had informed my world view on the important role women in Guyana, the Caribbean, Africa and the wider world played in humanizing mankind. However, it was in my many formal and informal discussions and debates with Sister Andaiye, in and out of the party's organs that I achieved new levels of consciousness on the marginalization of women in the economic, social and political processes. On the issue of child rights, her advocacy broke new ground in Guyana and contributed to the WPA's political world view on this issue.

There have been many excellent tributes paid to Andaiye's activism by her contemporaries that have and will continue to highlight her multi-talented contributions to the nation, the Caribbean and beyond. Her life, work and struggle have, deservedly, been well chronicled. Therefore, I will restrict my reflections to matters that will not readily be found in the public records.

I recall that about 2 years after the assassination of Walter Rodney Andaiye forced a debate in the WPA executive, on the issue of "whether the Party is stronger now than during the period of Walter's activism". For readers to appreciate the significance of this debate, I am forced to offer the context. The high point of WPA's and Walter Rodney's struggles against the then Burnham dictatorial regime was located in a three months period of intense daily protests, public meetings and mass demonstrations, mainly in Georgetown and the lower east coast of Demerara, which almost toppled the regime. This period became known as the "Civil Rebellion".

During this period the WPA started the process of transition to a political party which was completed after the assassination of Walter Rodney. In the post-Rodney phase, the party was better organised structurally, had developed many groups across the country and had organized many protests and notably, two nationwide days of rest that saw the economic and social life in Guyana come to a standstill. It is against this background that discussions in the party on the way

forward was taking place. It is in this context that Andaiye forced the debate in the executive on whether the party at that time was stronger than during Rodney's activism.

She was the leading advocate that the party, in spite of its significant organizational development was not stronger, but was in fact weaker. I was strongly opposed to her position and argued that the party was now stronger. Years later when events demonstrated the correctness of Andaiye's position, in the spirit of WPA's political culture I conceded, both privately and publicly, to her superior understanding of the party situation in the debate. Readers will I hope, forgive this necessary digression.

The Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry occasioned the opening of WPA's archive. I pointed to the importance the party leadership at the time placed on relying on a public defence for its security as against a military defence. I mentioned the important role played by Sister Andaiye and WPA women, under the stewardship of Andaiye who had the responsibility for party propaganda, locally and internationally. It is our considered judgement that the efficient and effective manner in which this most important task was executed was responsible for the party not suffering more casualties.

Sister Bonita Harris for many years held at her residence an annual new year social attended by her relatives, friends and WPA comrades. At one of those events, to my surprise, one of the guests was a daughter of President Burnham. I remember sometime later raising the issue with Andaiye and what it meant in light of the accusations being made about who was responsible for the assassination of Walter Rodney. Andaiye pondered for a brief moment and made a gesture that indicated neither agreement nor disapproval. I did not press the issue, from my knowledge of how WPA women operated whether in or out of the party, that the decision to invite the daughter of Burnham to Bonita's social was not by accident. It was an indication that the women were reaching across party lines. My judgement is this had the blessings or at least the non-objection of Andaiye.

In the run-up to the Walter Rodney COI Andaiye and I began to discuss how to deal with the inquiry to ensure the outcome we all wanted. Later Mr Chris Ram after volunteering his service as counsel joined the discussions. It was under Andaiye's guidance that we worked out the strategy and tactics which led to a successful outcome at the inquiry.

In concluding this tribute to our beloved Sister, Comrade and "Mother" of the WPA, Co-Founder of Red Thread, Founder of the Guyana Cancer Society etc. etc. etc. we collectively and individually mourn the irreplaceable loss of an iconic figure who led by example.

To all of us in the WPA, Red Thread and all the members of the other organisations whose lives she touched and affected by her humanity, I want to say to you Andaiye's passing, difficult as it is to endure, is something which we must all accept as an inevitable moment and to use her

examples as the cornerstone of our own efforts at improving the lives of people, particularly the most downtrodden in societies.

ANDAIYE LIVES! As long we continue the struggle. Farewell comrade.

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